



trade union information

THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT
IN THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY

THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT
IN IRELAND

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BRIEF HISTORY

Skilled workers and artisans in Ireland began combining in the first half of the 18th century, and in 1729 the first Combination Acts prohibiting workers from pressing employers for more pay or shorter hours were passed.

The Irish Parliament in 1760 passed Legislation which imposed severe penalties, including imprisonment and public whipping, for workers found guilty of combining to put pressure on their employer. In 1800 Irish workers were bound by the Combination Acts passed in the British Parliament in 1799 and 1800.

Repressive Legislation and its implementation did not succeed in preventing workers combining at local level and by 1840 locally-based organisations began to form loose national organisations. Irish union members participated in the foundation of the British TUC in 1868 and the TUC held its Annual Congress in Dublin in 1880 and in Belfast in 1893.

There was little time for discussing Irish affairs at the British TUC and an Irish TUC was established in 1894. At the Irish TUC's first Congress in Dublin, delegates attended from most of the unions in Ireland, both Irish and English, representing about 22,000 workers, mostly skilled.

In the period 1890-early 1900s, general unions for unskilled workers were formed and brought great hopes for the advance of general workers. Militant Leadership of the new unions in Ireland was provided by two British born activists, James Connolly, who came to Ireland in 1896, and Big Jim Larkin, who arrived in 1907. As well as being trade union organisers, Connolly was an advanced socialist thinker and political activist, and Larkin was a fiery agitator and brilliant propagandist on behalf of the exploited.

A historic Lock-out occurred in Dublin in 1913 over the right of unskilled employees to join Larkin's union - the Irish Transport Union, founded in 1909.

This confrontation which continued through the Autumn of 1913 and the winter of 1913-14 saw a bitter, and sometimes bloody, struggle between the powerful employers, backed up by the establishment of Church and State on one hand, and the poorest and weakest of Dublin's workers on the other. James Connolly described the outcome as a "drawn battle".

Irish workers, hardened by the struggles of 1913, proceeded to organise industrially and within a decade the Transport Union had 100,000 members. James Connolly was executed for his involvement in the 1916 Rising against British rule in Ireland, and involvement which was supported by some trade unionists and opposed by others. In the aftermath of the 1916 Rising, the Irish TUC took no position on the issue of Home Rule for Ireland in order to preserve unity with the Protestant workers of Belfast, Ireland's only industrialised city.

In 1923, Jim Larkin on his return to Ireland after nine years in the United States became involved in a bitter dispute with the acting General Secretary of the Irish Transport Union, William O'Brien, which resulted in a split within the Union, and a new union, the Workers' Union of Ireland, was established, with Larkin as its General Secretary. Other Irish-based unions were also established in the 1920s and British unions continued to expand in both States in Ireland. The British TGWU became established as the union for general workers in Northern Ireland, and also consolidated its position as the third biggest union in the then Irish Free State.

In the 1930s a resurgence of nationalism saw a campaign against British unions in Ireland. Some Leaders of Irish-based unions were arguing for the withdrawal of British unions from Ireland and the tensions between the Irish- and British-based unions was the real though not ostensible cause of the split in the Irish TUC in 1945. Fifteen Irish-based unions left the Irish TUC and decided "to establish a National Trade Union Organisation, composed of unions with headquarters in Ireland". The new organisation was

called the Congress of Irish Unions. Not all the Irish-based unions left the Irish TUC to join the CIU.

Describing the background to the split, Professor Charles McCarthy of Trinity College says, "the divide already existed, profound and apparently irreconcilable between Catholic Nationalist sentiment on the one hand, and on the other the more liberal, mildly socialist British form of trade unionism".

Since over 90% of trade unionists in Northern Ireland were members of non-Irish based unions, the Congress of Irish Trade Unions was almost exclusively a Republic of Ireland organisation, and the only links between Protestant trade unionists in the North and trade unionists in the South, were through the Irish TUC.

The division of the Irish trade union movement into two Congresses lasted for fourteen years. In 1953 a Joint Unity Committee was established, and in 1956 the Provisional United Organisation of the Irish Trade Union Movement was set up to prepare a Constitution for a united body within three years. The ITUC and CIU terminated their separate existence in 1959, and the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, incorporating both bodies, came into existence. The new Constitution of the ICTU recognised the position of British based trade unions in Ireland while insisting on autonomy in relation to Irish Affairs. The incoming President of the ICTU, Jim Larkin Junior (a son of "Big Jim") stressed the need for co-operation at the first ICTU Conference; "We must continue to understand each other's point of view and work together".

TRADE UNION MEMBERSHIP IN IRELAND

An Irish Congress of Trade Unions survey showed that there were 89 unions (1978) in the Republic of Ireland with a total membership of 465,000. This figure represents 62% of the workforce and, according to Eurostat Social Indicators, represents the third highest organisational density in the E.E.C.

Of the 89 unions, 70 were affiliated to the Irish Congress of Trade Unions. These 70 unions represent about 93% of the organised workers in the Republic. Of the total membership in the Republic 247,100, or 53%, is from the six General Unions. The ITGWU (Irish Transport and General Workers Union), with a membership of 133,999, represented 29% of the total trade union membership in the Irish Republic.

There were 18 trade unions not affiliated to the Irish Congress of Trade Unions. Only four of these unions had a membership of more than 2,000 (Irish Bank Officials Association, Irish Nurses Organisation, Marine Port and General Workers Union and the National Busmens Union). Seven of the unaffiliated unions had a membership of less than 150.

There were 16 unions with members in the Republic whose head offices are in Britain. The membership of these unions in the Republic was 77,330, or 17% of total trade union membership.

The following table sets out a distribution of trade unions in 1978 in the Republic by size of union. It will be seen that 41 unions (almost half the total) had a membership of under 1,000 each. The aggregate membership of these unions represented less than 4% of total trade union membership.

	No. of Unions	Members		
		No.	%	Cum.%
Under 1,000 members	41	16,785	3.6	3.6
1,000 - 1,500	6	6,862	1.5	5.1
1,500 - 2,000	6	10,322	2.2	7.3
2,000 - 3,000	10	25,128	5.4	12.7
3,001 - 5,000	7	26,772	5.8	18.5
5,000 - 7,500	6	39,790	8.6	27.1
7,500 - 10,000	6	55,580	11.9	39.0
10,001 - 20,000	4	57,078	12.3	51.3
Over 20,000 members	3	227,045	48.8	100.0
Total	89	465,362	100-0	

The following are the ten largest unions affiliated to the Irish Congress of Trade Unions in the Republic (1982 Figures).

Irish Transport and General Workers Union	151,000
Federated Workers Union of Ireland	50,000
Irish Union of Distributive Workers and Clerks	21,000
Irish National Teachers Organisation	21,973
Association of Scientific Technical and Managerial Staffs	20,200
National Engineering and Electrical Trades Union	17,000
Local Government and Public Services Union	16,000
Amalgamated Transport and General Workers Union	15,000
Post Office Workers Union	13,000
Civil and Public Services Staff Association	12,003

TRADE UNION MEMBERSHIP IN NORTHERN IRELAND

In 1982 there were 40 unions with members in Northern Ireland affiliated to the Irish Congress of Trade Unions. This represented an affiliation to Congress of over 90% of all trade unionist in Northern Ireland.

LEGAL STATUS OF TRADE UNIONS

The Trade Union Act, 1913, defines a trade union as "any combination, whether temporary or permanent, the principal objects of which are under its constitution the regulation of the relations between workmen and masters, or between workmen and workmen, or between masters and masters, of the imposing of restrictive conditions on the conduct of any trade or business and also the provision of benefits to members".

An earlier Act, the Trade Union Act, 1871, provided that a trade union may be registered at the Registry of Friendly Societies. Registration confers a certain limited legal existence on a trade union, and it may sue in its own name and vest property in trustees. Moreover, it is exempt from taxation of its income arising from members' subscriptions and is also free from legal proceedings with regard to its internal affairs. Unions which are not registered

possess all the civil and criminal immunities arising from the 1871 Act but do not enjoy the extra privileges of the registered unions, e.g. they can sue and be sued only in the names of representative persons.

A registry of Friendly Societies was established in Dublin when the Irish Free State came into existence: Some years later the High Court held that unions must be registered in Dublin if they wished to enjoy the privileges of registration even though they were already registered in the United Kingdom.

The Trade Union Act, 1941, laid down that no body of persons may negotiate about wages and working conditions unless it held a negotiating licence issued by the Minister for Labour. Licences may be issued only to unions registered in accordance with Irish Law or to unions which, though not registered under Irish Law, are recognised as trade unions by the law of another country in which its headquarters are located.

In short, unions in the Republic may be (1) unregistered and unlicensed, (2) unregistered and licensed, (3) registered and unlicensed, or (4) registered and licensed. The first category includes a number of civil service associations, most "house" unions and unions which form part of a Federation. The second category includes all the unions whose headquarters are outside the State. Category three includes registered unions which are members of a licensed federated union. The fourth category includes the ordinary Irish trade unions other than those catering for State employees.

METHODS OF CO-ORDINATION

The problems posed by both the external structure and the multiplicity of trade unions have been dealt with in a variety of ways, the simplest being that unions occasionally enter into agreements covering the areas or the class of worker they will organise. A second method employed is that of common action by all or some of the unions in an industry for the purpose of collective bargaining. Representatives of each union concerned

are appointed to a central committee which acts as a common negotiating body. Each component union is free to accept or reject decisions of the committees. The Irish Congress of Trade Unions encourages the formation of such groups. A third method is the formation of a federation such as the Civil Service Alliance. A federation is a permanent grouping of separate unions in which each retains its separate existence, funds, officers, and independence in regard to matters which concern it alone, but forms with the other a permanent joint organisation having its own name, funds and officers for purposes concerning all, such federations however are insignificant. In some cases separate unions amalgamate with each other to form one new union thereby terminating their own separate existence.

Apart from the foregoing methods of dealing with the multi-union problem the local trades councils and the Irish Congress of Trade Unions are particularly important in co-ordinating the work of unions at local and national level.

A number of important amalgamations have taken place in recent years, the most notable being between the Workers Union of Ireland and the Federated Rural Workers. This resulted in a new union being created, the Federated Workers Union of Ireland. Another example was the merger of the Irish Actors Equity with the Irish Transport and General Workers Union.

Congress has established a co-ordinating committee comprising representatives of Trades Councils and Congress Executive Council members, to co-ordinate Congress and Trade Councils activities in areas that have been agreed.

THE IRISH CONGRESS OF TRADE UNIONS

The Irish Congress of Trade Unions is the central trade union organisation in Ireland. Its activities and jurisdiction covers both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. Congress holds an Annual Conference to review the report of its Executive Council and to adopt Policy. The Annual Delegate Conference also determines

policy on the basis of motions submitted by affiliated organisations or the Executive Council.

The Executive Council is elected at the Annual Conference and holds office for one year. The election is on the basis of proportional representation. While delegations' size is decided by the membership of the union, this is arranged on a scale which ensures that smaller unions have a proportionably greater voice in influencing decisions. All voting at the Conference is by way of delegation size, with the exception of votes involving financial matters when the card vote system, based on membership of unions, is used.

The executive authority of Congress is the Executive Council, which consists of the President, Vice-President and Treasurer along with 22 other members. There is a Northern Ireland Committee of Congress and a Northern Ireland Conference is held annually. Both deal exclusively with Northern Ireland affairs.

Congress has no power over the internal affairs of the unions affiliated to it. Decisions taken by Congress at, for example, a delegate meeting, do not bind an affiliated union unless ratified by it.

Hence the Congress depends on the goodwill and co-operation of the unions for the implementation of its decisions. Like the British TUC, the only real power which Congress has over member unions is the power to suspend or expel them. On the other hand, the moral authority of Congress has often been used to good effect especially in regard to the settlement of inter-union disputes. To an increasing extent unions look to the Congress for leadership and also for information and assistance in negotiation and the processing of disputes. As a result the influence exerted by Congress is altogether greater than what might be expected and in fact it is a considerable force in Irish social and economic life.

To be eligible for membership of Congress a trade union must either:

- have their headquarters in Ireland and have their executive control, in respect of industrial, financial and political

matters, vested in and exercised by appropriate executive bodies within Ireland; or

- if their headquarters are not in Ireland, they must
 - (a) provide that only members resident in Ireland may be appointed as delegates to an annual or special delegate conference or nominated for election to any office in Congress, and
 - (b) provide that decisions on matters of an industrial or political nature which arise out of, and are in connection with, the internal economic and political conditions of Ireland and are of direct concern to Irish members only, shall be considered and decided upon by the Irish members;
 - (c) provide that a delegate conference of Irish members or an Irish committee elected by the Irish membership shall make such decisions, and
 - (d) make reasonable provision whereby the Irish committee or conference may exercise financial control and direction over funds collected from the Irish members at least to the extent of payment of local administrative expenses and benefits.

NORTHERN IRELAND COMMITTEE

The Irish Congress of Trade Unions hold an annual conference for its affiliated organisations with membership in Northern Ireland. The Conference elects a committee to deal with matters which specifically affect Northern Ireland.

Over the last twelve years, a time of great suffering and difficulty in Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Committee of Congress in co-operation with unions has been instrumental in keeping the violence from workplaces and has withstood intimidation from extremists on both sides of the political divide. The Northern Ireland Committee organised a "Better Life for All Campaign". This campaign highlighted the many social and economic problems which contributed to the problems of Northern Ireland and put forward policies for their solution.

A conference of delegates from affiliated organisations with members in Northern Ireland is held each year. Congress maintains an office in Belfast serviced by its Northern Ireland Officer and staff.

The special constitutional position given to the Northern Ireland Committee does not affect the overall authority of the Annual Delegate Conference with which final decisions on all policy matters rests, nor does it affect the right of affiliated organisations to send delegates to Annual or Special Delegate Conferences, in addition to the Northern Ireland Conference.

OTHER CONGRESS COMMITTEES

The Appeals Board is the only body apart from the Executive Council which is elected by delegates to Annual Conference. The Board hears complaints from groups of members about lack of service from their own unions. It can also hear a complaint by an individual of unjustified expulsion from the union.

The Disputes Committee is appointed by the Executive Council to investigate disputes between unions. The Committee consists of Executive Council members and others drawn from a panel nominated by unions. Most disputes referred to this Committee are concerned with the organisation of union members.

A Demarcation Tribunal is appointed to investigate a demarcation dispute on its own initiative or at the request of a party to the dispute. The Tribunal is possibly the most authoritative Committee appointed by Congress, and its decisions are made without reference to the Executive Council and are final and binding.

The Industrial Relations Committee has the function of operating the all-out strike procedures approved by the Annual Conference of Congress in 1970.

In accordance with the all-out strike rules, a union is free to place a picket on its own initiative if this picket clearly only

affects the union's own members. Where a union is involved in a dispute situation and it wishes to have the support of other union members, it is required to make an application to the Industrial Relations Committee for an all-out strike. The Committee consults with the other unions involved to ascertain whether the unions consent to the all-out strike. The Industrial Relations Committee have the authority of granting the application for the all-out strike, postponing the application, or refusing it. Where the all-out strike is granted, a picket sign with the full authority of Congress and authorised by Congress is issued to the union in dispute and may be placed at work locations, specified by the Committee.

The policy of the all-out strike was instituted by Congress both to prevent the discrediting of picketing and to secure an effective means of common action by trade unions in a dispute situation.

The effect of the all-out strike policy has been to improve communication between unions in dispute situations and has made a contribution towards finding a solution to disputes without having to resort to strike action.

To help advise the Executive Council there are a number of sub-committees in Congress. These include:

Protective Legislation Committee	
Women's Advisory Committee	Youth Advisory Committee
Industrial Democracy Committee	Committee on Technology
Third World Committee	
Committee on Low Paid Workers	

INDUSTRIAL COMMITTEES

The Irish Congress of Trade Unions has adopted a system of Industrial Committees to bring together unions in particular sectors which consult on matters relating to organisation, trade union structure, joint working agreements, wages and other negotiation matters, economic problems relating to the industry and measures to deal with them.

TRADE UNION GROUPS

In certain employments, Congress has established trade union groups. While groups have many of the functions of an Industrial Committee, they largely operate independently from Congress after their establishment. The distinguishing feature is that Trade Union Groups relate to specific employments/enterprises rather than industries.

NATIONAL PAY AGREEMENTS

In 1971 the Irish Congress of Trade Unions concluded a National Pay Agreement with employer organisations. Prior to 1971 wage rounds were largely initiated by the action of individual unions or groups of unions that established pay norms which other unions tended to follow. In the years 1952, 1957 and 1964 however, agreements on pay were negotiated centrally. The 1970 Congress entered into negotiations for a National Pay Agreement with employer organisations. The Agreement, basically the first of its kind in Ireland, had two phases:

- 1) A flat rate increase for all workers (thus favouring the lower-paid), plus a special arrangement to reduce the female-male wage differentials;
- 2) A percentage increase after 12 months plus a supplementary increase determined by the increase in the cost of living during the first phase.

The 1971 Agreement also included provision for the monitoring of the Agreement. This first National Agreement was considered to have made a significant contribution to improving the position of lower-paid workers and to improving industrial relations. It also established machinery for resolving disputes about any matter covered by the Agreement and trade unions were prohibited from supporting any industrial action which sought to contravene the terms of the Agreement.

DEVELOPMENT OF NATIONAL UNDERSTANDING

National Agreements (negotiated in 1972) continued to operate until 1979 when the trade union movement took a new initiative

at the centralised level to widen the scope of national agreements. Following the 1977 general election, Congress entered into discussions with the Minister for Economic and Social Planning with a view to widening the scope of the national agreements to cover Economic and Social issues as well as pay. It was agreed by the Government that such a development was desirable to enable certain national economic and social objectives to be achieved. For the first time Government became directly involved with the trade union movement and employer organisations on the matters which should be agreed centrally. While the trade union movement had always been involved in making representations to various Government Ministers on matters affecting its members, the National Understanding was agreed with the Government and this was a new development. One of the important concessions which the trade union movement obtained was a clear statement that the Government was committed to the goal of full employment and to a number of specific initiatives on employment and a number of other matters, e.g.

the establishment of sectoral committees to facilitate a planning strategy for industry; a commitment to adjust the taxation system to ensure that every income recipient paid his/her fair share of tax; and a commitment to raise the living standards of social welfare recipients by adjusting payments in accordance with changes in the cost of living. An improvement in the eligibility for health services was also provided.

Other matters which the National Understanding dealt with included worker participation, education and training and industrial relations.

In 1980 a second National Understanding was concluded, which developed further the ideas contained in the first Understanding. Commitments were made by Government to enter into discussions on the disclosure of company information; the establishment of child-care facilities; the publication of a Green Paper on the handicapped; the introduction of paid maternity leave for women in employment; the extension of employee participation at board level to additional State companies; and the initiation of discussions on worker participation in the public sector. The Government also committed itself to providing additional real resources for education

and to increase Exchequer contributions to the Irish Congress of Trade Unions and its affiliated organisations, for training and advisory services. There were many other economic and social issues covered by the Understanding.

In 1981, the attempt by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions to reach a further Central Agreement with a newly-elected Fine Gael/Labour coalition failed. Likewise, the attempt to negotiate a National Pay Agreement with employer organisations in the context of a National Understanding also failed.

THE LABOUR COURT

The Labour Court was established in 1946 and consists of a Chairman, three Deputy Chairmen and eight ordinary members who are appointed by the Minister for Labour. The eight ordinary members nominated by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions and the Federated Union of Employers, ensure that the Court consists of an independent Chairman and an equal number of workers and employer representatives.

The main function of the Court is the investigation of industrial disputes. Parties to a trade dispute can request a Labour Court investigation and normally the Court will agree to this, unless it believes that the parties involved should continue to seek a solution on their own initiative. The Court may make a recommendation which sets out its opinion on the merits of the dispute and the terms on which it should be settled, indicating the cases submitted by each party to the dispute. The Court's recommendations are not binding and responsibility for the settlement of disputes remains with the parties involved.

In 1980 the Labour Court issued 802 Recommendations.

CONCILIATION

The 1946 Industrial Relations Act empowers the Labour Court to appoint Industrial Relations Officers (i.e. conciliation officer) to help the parties in resolving disputes.

In 1980 the Conciliation Service was involved in 1,375 conferences on industrial relations problems and were instrumental in helping to find a solution in about half of the cases dealt with.

RIGHTS COMMISSIONERS

The 1969 Industrial Relations Act empowered the Minister for Labour to appoint a Rights Commissioner who in certain cases could investigate an industrial dispute. The Rights Commissioner is prohibited from investigating trade disputes which are concerned about establishing rates of pay, hours of work or annual leave for workers.

The Rights Commissioners work in the areas where there is a complaint that existing rights have been interfered with.

EQUALITY OFFICERS

Under the provisions of the Anti-Discrimination (Pay) Act 1974 and the Employment Equality Act 1977, disputes which concern equal pay entitlements or discrimination in employment on grounds of sex or marital status, may be referred to an Equality Officer of the Labour Court for investigation.

During the course of an investigation the Equality Officer examines written submissions made by the parties, meets the parties and may visit premises to inspect the work that is being carried out.

Following an investigation the Equality Officer issues a Recommendation to the parties to the dispute. Either party may make an appeal against the Recommendation of an Equality Officer to the Labour Court or complain if a Recommendation has not been implemented. The Court's findings in such cases are binding on both parties.

REGISTERED AGREEMENTS

The Labour Court is also empowered to register agreements which have been reached through the collective bargaining process. One of the benefits of a registered agreement is that it ensures that all workers of a particular class, type or group who are covered by the agreement but are not necessarily parties to it, can have the same wages and conditions applied to them as the workers whose unions negotiated the agreement.

JOINT LABOUR COMMITTEES

The Labour Court is also empowered, under the 1946 Industrial Relations Act, to establish Joint Labour Committees. An application for the establishment of a Joint Labour Committee must be on the grounds that there is substantial agreement between workers and employers that it should be established.

A Joint Labour Committee consists of an equal number of representatives of employers and workers who are appointed by the Court, and a Chairman and other independent persons appointed by the Minister for Labour.

The purpose of a Joint Labour Committee is to establish minimum rates and conditions for workers employed in particular industries or services, where there is weak trade union organisation or where it is difficult to organise workers into trade unions.

THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT AND POLITICS

The Labour Party was in effect founded in 1912 and was linked with the Irish Trade Union Congress as one organisation from 1918. During the 1920s, debates developed within the Congress as to the desirability of having the political wing and industrial wing of the Labour movement as one organisation. A number of leading trade unionists argued that it was difficult to develop the industrial functions of Congress while it remained part of the political wing. In 1930 a decision was made to create two separate organisations.

Since 1930 while the trade union movement has developed significantly in both size and influence on national affairs, the Labour Party has not achieved the same degree of success as its political wing. The two main parties, Fianna Fail and Fine Gael, which effectively developed out of the Civil War in 1922-23, enjoy a vastly greater degree of support than the Labour Party. The Labour Party now (in 1982) has a representation of 15 Deputies in the National Parliament. On four occasions it has joined a Coalition Government. During these periods of Government the Labour Party was instrumental in introducing some legislative measures which had long been sought by the trade union movement. The Irish Congress of Trade Unions is not affiliated to the Labour Party although the principal individual unions are. Despite this affiliation of unions, the Labour Party has failed to attract mass support from trade union members.

The Irish Congress of Trade Unions has played a leading role in influencing many political developments, most notably the development of the concept of National Understandings in recent years. It conducted a successful campaign in 1959 and again in 1969 against a proposal to change the Constitutional provision relating to an electoral system which provides for proportional representation for election to the Irish Parliament (Dail Eireann).

In Northern Ireland, trade unions have had a difficult task in dealing with the Authorities there. (For many years the Irish Congress of Trade Unions was not recognised by the Government there, but, in 1964 agreement was reached on recognition). The Northern Ireland Committee of Congress has played a leading role in the affairs of Northern Ireland. In particular since 1969 it has played an important part in preventing the trade union movement dividing on sectarian lines and this has been an important contribution to peace in Northern Ireland.

WORKER PARTICIPATION

In July 1975 the Coalition Government (the Labour Party was a minority partner in this Government) as part of their Programme published a White Paper on the election of employee representatives

to the boards of State companies. After Congress consultation with affiliated unions on the White Paper, a report and its recommendations were approved by Executive Council.

The report emphasised the constitutional objective of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, that the trade union movement should work for such fundamental changes in the social and economic system as would secure for workers adequate and effective participation in the control of industries or services where they are employed.

In relation to the proposals made by the Minister for Labour, Congress urged the establishment of a two-tier board system. This demand was in line with Congress support for the EEC proposals on worker participation at board level (the so-called Fifth Directive).

Congress also called for participative machinery to be established at the level of the management board. This was to be comprised of trade union representatives who would have access to all the information necessary for the discharge of their functions within the participative machinery.

The report also called for the limiting of nominations of candidates to **boards** by trade unions licensed under the Trade Union Acts, and that voting should be restricted to trade union members in good standing.

Another claim by Congress was that the election of workers to board should be optional. Trade union members employed in each enterprise should be given the opportunity of deciding whether or not they wished to proceed with the election of worker directors.

In 1976 a Bill was introduced in Parliament to provide for the election of one-third of the boards of the following public enterprises as worker directors:

Aer Lingus (air transport)

Bord Na Mona (peat production)

British and Irish Steam Packet Co. (sea transport)
Irish Sugar Company (sugar and food processing)
Coras Iompair Eireann (road and rail transport)
Electricity Supply Board
Nitrigín Eireann Teo (fertilisers manufacturing)

Worker directors have since been elected to the boards of these enterprises and discussions have taken place within the enterprises on the development of participation structures below board level.

THE TRADE UNIONS AND THE EEC

At its annual conference of 1971 the Irish Congress of Trade Unions adopted a resolution criticising the Government for not having fulfilled its obligations to the people in respect of the application for entry to the EEC on the grounds that it had not "adequately surveyed and quantified the effects of EEC entry and the various alternatives on employment and on workers' living standards". The resolution also condemned the Government for not having "secured in its negotiations any adequate recognition by the EEC of the dangers to industrial employment involved in the accession of Ireland to EEC". In view of the foregoing, and also because of the fear that EEC policies would result in "the loss of effective control of political and economic policy" and might result in "involvement in military commitments" as well as "a substantial increase in the rate of agricultural depopulation, the widespread sale of land to non-nationals, the destruction of or severe damage to the fishing industry", the conference resolved that it was "not in a position at the present time to express any support for the proposed entry of Ireland to the EEC".

Subsequently a special conference was called to consider EEC membership in detail. This again decided against membership though by a narrow margin - 58% of the delegates deciding against membership and 42% deciding in favour, with the largest union (I.T.G.W.U.) opposing entry. In spite of the decision of the Congress, some major unions supported membership on the terms negotiated by the Government.

In the event the vote in the subsequent referendum in 1972 in favour of joining the EEC was overwhelming (82%). It is obvious that the great majority of trade unionists voted "yes" in spite of the decision by the Congress Conference.

The Irish trade union movement accepted the verdict of the referendum and it has since played a full part in the work of the Community since 1 January 1973, both directly and through the European Trade Union Confederation, which it joined in March 1974. It has used Community policies, for example, in its fight to achieve improved social benefits and in the drive to secure equal pay between men and women. It has worked to obtain an appropriate share of the European Social Fund for training and retraining Irish workers and in the regional fund it has also responded to the impulse given by the Community towards worker participation in enterprises.

The Irish trade union movement plays a full and active part in all of the EEC advisory committees on which it is represented.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES - INFORMATION

Commission of the European Communities, Rue de la Loi 200, 1049 Bruxelles

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Information offices - Bureaux de presse et d'information - Uffici stampa e informazione -
Voorlichtingsbureaus**

BELGIQUE — BELGIË

Rue Archimede 73 -
Archimedesstraat 73
1040 Bruxelles — 1040 Brussel
Tél. : 735 00 40/735 80 40

DANMARK

Gammel Torv 4
Postbox 144
1004 København K
Tlf. : (01) 14 41 40/(01) 14 55 12

BR DEUTSCHLAND

Zitelmannstraße 22
5300 Bonn
Tel. : 23 80 41

Kurfürstendamm 102
1000 Berlin 31
Tel. : 8 92 40 28

ΕΛΛΑΣ

Οδός Βασιλίσσης Σοφίας 2
Καί' Ηρώδου 'Αττικού
Αθήνα 134
τηλ. : 743 982/743 983/743 984

FRANCE

61, rue des Belles Feuilles
75782 Paris Cedex 16
Tél. : 501 58 85

IRELAND

39 Molesworth Street
Dublin 2
Tel. : 71 22 44

ITALIA

Via Poli. 29
00187 Roma
Tel. : 678 97 22
Corso Magenta, 61
20123 Milano
Tel. 805 92 09

GRAND-DUCHÉ DE LUXEMBOURG

Centre européen
Bâtiment Jean Monnet B/O
L-2920 Luxembourg
Tél. : 43011

NEDERLAND

Lange Voorhout 29
Den Haag
Tel. : 46 93 26

UNITED KINGDOM

20, Kensington Palace Gardens
London W8 4QQ
Tel. : 727 8090

Windsor House
9/15 Bedford Street
Belfast
Tel. : 407 08

4 Cathedral Road
Cardiff CF1 9SG
Tel. : 37 1631

7 Alva Street
Edinburgh EH2 4PH
Tel. : 225 2058

ESPAÑA

Calle de Serrano 41
5A Planta-Madrid I
Tel. : 474 11 87

PORTUGAL

35, rua do Sacramento à Lapa
1200 Lisboa
Tel. : 66 75 96

TÜRKİYE

13. Bogaz Sokak
Kavaklıdere
Ankara
Tel. : 27 61 45/27 61 46

SCHWEIZ - SUISSE - SVIZZERA

Casse postale 195
37-39, rue de Vermont
1211 Genève 20
Tél. : 34 97 50

UNITED STATES

2100 M Street, NW
Suite 707
Washington, DC 20037
Tel. : 862 95 00

1 Dag Hammarskjöld Plaza
245 East 47th Street
New York, NY 10017
Tel. : 371 38 04

CANADA

Inn of the Provinces
Office Tower
Suite 1110
Sparks' Street 350
Ottawa, Ont. K1R 7S8
Tel. : 238 64 64

AMERICA LATINA

Avda Ricardo Lyon 1177
Santiago de Chile 9
Chile
Adresse postale : Casilla 10093
Tel. : 25 05 55

Quinta Bienvenida
Valle Arriba
Calle Colibri
Distrito Sucre
Caracas
Venezuela
Tel. : 91 47 07

NIPPON

Kowa 25 Building
8-7 Sanbanchu
Chiyoda-Ku
Tokyo 102
Tel. : 239 04 41

ASIA

Thai Military Bank Building
34 Phya Thai Road
Bangkok
Thailand
Tel. : 282 14 52